

What are shin splints – why do runners get them

How to care for the injury

By

Yehuda Packer

“Coach Packman”

Ever go out for a nice and relaxing run and somewhere along the way, you feel a tightness along the front part of your lower leg, and pain coming from the muscle commonly called the “calf muscle?” You continue with the run and once you get back, you find yourself in severe pain and almost unable to walk. How could that be, what is that pain, what did I do wrong and most importantly, how do I fix it in time for my next run? Let me introduce you to one of the most common running injuries “shin splints.” Medial Tibial (shin bone) stress syndrome a term some doctors use, or commonly referred to as shin splints, is inflammation of the connective tissue or fascia that attaches to the muscles and bones. When the area gets inflamed, it becomes super sensitive and painful. There are many different reasons why this syndrome occurs, and this article will give you a better understanding of the injury. Below are what I believe to be the top 5 reasons for shin splints.

1. Flat feet with over pronation
2. Improper shoe size, fit, and a lack of support
3. Weak ankles, hips, and poor “core” strength and flexibility
4. Beginning a workout without a proper warmup and finishing without a proper warm-down
5. Doing too much, too fast, and the body is not properly trained to complete the task

So, now that you know what shin splints are, how we commonly get them, the big question is “how do we heal the injury?” The first thing to consider is to consult your physician and get an expert opinion as to what you believe to be shin splints. Seeing a doctor can eliminate other possible problems such as stress fractures, real structural problems with the feet, and can give you recommendations to see other specialist such as a podiatrist if need be. Once your physician gives you an approval to begin a physical therapy or stretching strength building program, you are now ready to begin the healing process.

One of the most successful remedies for shin splints is “rest” that’s right, rest is probably the most important aspect of healing and without it, the injury will continue unabated. The good news is, rest doesn’t mean no physical exercise, but rather to rest specifically from running. You can do other sports such as cycling, yoga, stretching, and an array of other fun activities without causing impact on the lower legs. The second most important modality to heal shin

splints is a proper stretching / strength building program. That program should be very specific to the shin splint injury and I use a common kinesiology term **Specific Adaptation Imposed Demand** (referred to as the "S.A.I.D." principal) as a model to directly address the injury. Using the S.A.I.D. model and choosing the proper stretching strength building routine, will cut your healing time tremendously and hopefully you will be running once again.

Below you will find specific stretches / strength building exercises, which have been used by many trainers, physical therapist and doctors for years. I did not invent the stretches / strength building exercises, but I have utilized them for myself personally, for my athletes and found great success in their ability to prevent and heal shin splints.

Seated Shin Stretch

Yoga kneel position then reach back with your hands behind your back and bring up your knees. Hold for 30 seconds and release. Repeat 3 times

Soleus muscle stretch

Stand facing a wall or closed door. Place both hands on the wall. Step one foot slightly behind the other. Slowly squat down so you are bending both knees to feel the stretch. Keep both heels on the floor the entire time.

Gastrocnemius muscle stretch

Same as wall position except step one foot back (the one you are stretching) and keep that leg straight. Bend your front knee. Keep both feet flat on the floor. Lean forward to feel the stretch in your calf muscle.

Calf raises

Stand on a step or step stool with the balls of your feet on the stool and the back half floating off of it. Slowly raise up on your toes and then drop, stretch your foot and calf muscles as your heels lower.

Toes drag and kneeling shin stretch

Place one hand on the wall for support, bend both knees slightly, place one foot flat on the ground and the other foot with your toes in a bent position. Lean forward and begin to feel the stretch on the shin area. You can do this stretch while sitting on a chair as well (toe position is the same).

Foam rolling

Start out with a soft foam roller and gently roll across the shin bones and entire calf muscle. Although it will start out to be uncomfortable, it will subside as you continue to roll. Be careful

not to press too hard on the roller, go easy and smoothly. Also concentrate on the painful spots and then move off of them as you roll.

Rest and Ice

As mentioned in the article, it is very important to remember to rest the affected area and to cease the running until the injury is healed. You will know when the injury is gone when you can run without any pain or being uncomfortable. Lastly, using an ice bag or similar device, to the affected area, will also reduce the pain and inflammation. Use the following acronym which will help also help you with this particular modality.

- **R.I.C.E. Rest-Ice-Compression-Elevation**
- Rest is the most important aspect to healing
- Ice will help reduce the swelling of the area
- Compression will reduce swelling and allow blood flow to move in and out of the area
- Elevation will help reduce swelling and take blood flow away from the area
- **R.I.C.E. Rest-Ice-Compression-Elevation**

In conclusion, remember that it is important to see your physician prior to engaging in any home remedy exercise program. Once the physician gives you the approval, go ahead and engage in the outlined stretching program and watch your healing process begin.

*Yehuda Packer graduated from California State University Northridge with a Bachelor of Arts in Physical Education-emphasis in Kinesiology, and a Master of Science from University of Tiffin, Ohio. Yehuda is a 4 time All American Runner in the 10,000 meters' track, and 3,000 meter steeplechase. After switching from running to Cycling, Yehuda races category 1-3 both open and master races. Placed top 6 in USA Cycling Masters Nationals Championships and is an Israeli National Champion in both the Individual Time Trial and Road Race respectively. He continues to train 6 days a week, races in Level 1 pro no age group races in Israel and is a USA cycling level 1 coach. You can send a note to Yehuda at the following email address. Packmancycling@gmail.com